

Connecting Alzheimer’s Patients and Caregivers

Connecting Alzheimer’s Patients and Caregivers Through Music and Support Programs Designed Into the Built Environment

Abstract

Alzheimer's disease is an incurable neurological disorder that not only affects the individual diagnosed with this disease but their family members and caregivers as well. This research study examines how the relationship between Alzheimer's patients and their caregivers can be improved through various types of therapy and design. More specifically, how music therapy, support programs and familiar spaces can better connect individuals with Alzheimer’s disease to their family or caregivers when properly designed into the built environment. To determine if the built environment can better connect individuals with Alzheimer’s disease and their families or caregivers, a survey was conducted. The survey was administered to six individuals who provide care to people who suffer from Alzheimer’s disease. The survey consisted of a range of questions on the living environment of Alzheimer’s patients and how they engage with these specific spaces. The survey also asked questions on music therapy and support programs for Alzheimer’s patients. The survey found that specific environments impact the way patients participate in support programs with their caregivers. The survey also found that the environment has a major impact on patients’ personal relationships with their caregivers. The results strongly suggest that music therapy, support programs and familiar design elements should be incorporated into the built environment to allow for a better connection to be formed between Alzheimer’s patients and caregivers.

Context & Purpose

Alzheimer’s disease is an incurable neurological disorder that affects an individual’s ability to function independently in society. Through this disease, many family members and caregivers are devastated as they are forgotten as the disease progresses. Family members and caregivers lose the connection they once shared with their loved one dealing with Alzheimer’s. Many programs and strategies have been developed to deal with this disease, such as musical therapy, support programs and design considerations. However, the idea of incorporating these methods into a built environment in order to connect caregivers and the person with Alzheimer's, has not been further looked into. It's important to create environments that support these strategies in order to build relationships between caregivers and Alzheimer’s patients. The purpose of this study is to determine how music therapy, support programs and familiar spaces can better connect people with Alzheimer’s to their family or caregivers when properly designed into a built environment. A key element to this research study is understanding how design choices can impact the success of these strategies. Creating spaces that support these methods, use familiar design elements and involve caregivers, will show how the built environment can create better relationships in the lives of people with Alzheimer’s.

Hypothesis

Through the research presented, we can see how important music therapy, support programs and the built environment are for Alzheimer’s patients and their family or caregivers.

- Undetermined how beneficial these strategies can be when used for the purpose of strengthening and building relationships.
- To determine what kind of impact designed environments can have when music therapy, support programs and familiar design elements are incorporated.
- Important to see how these centralized spaces will allow for these programs to further mend relationships that have been damaged by this disease.

Objective

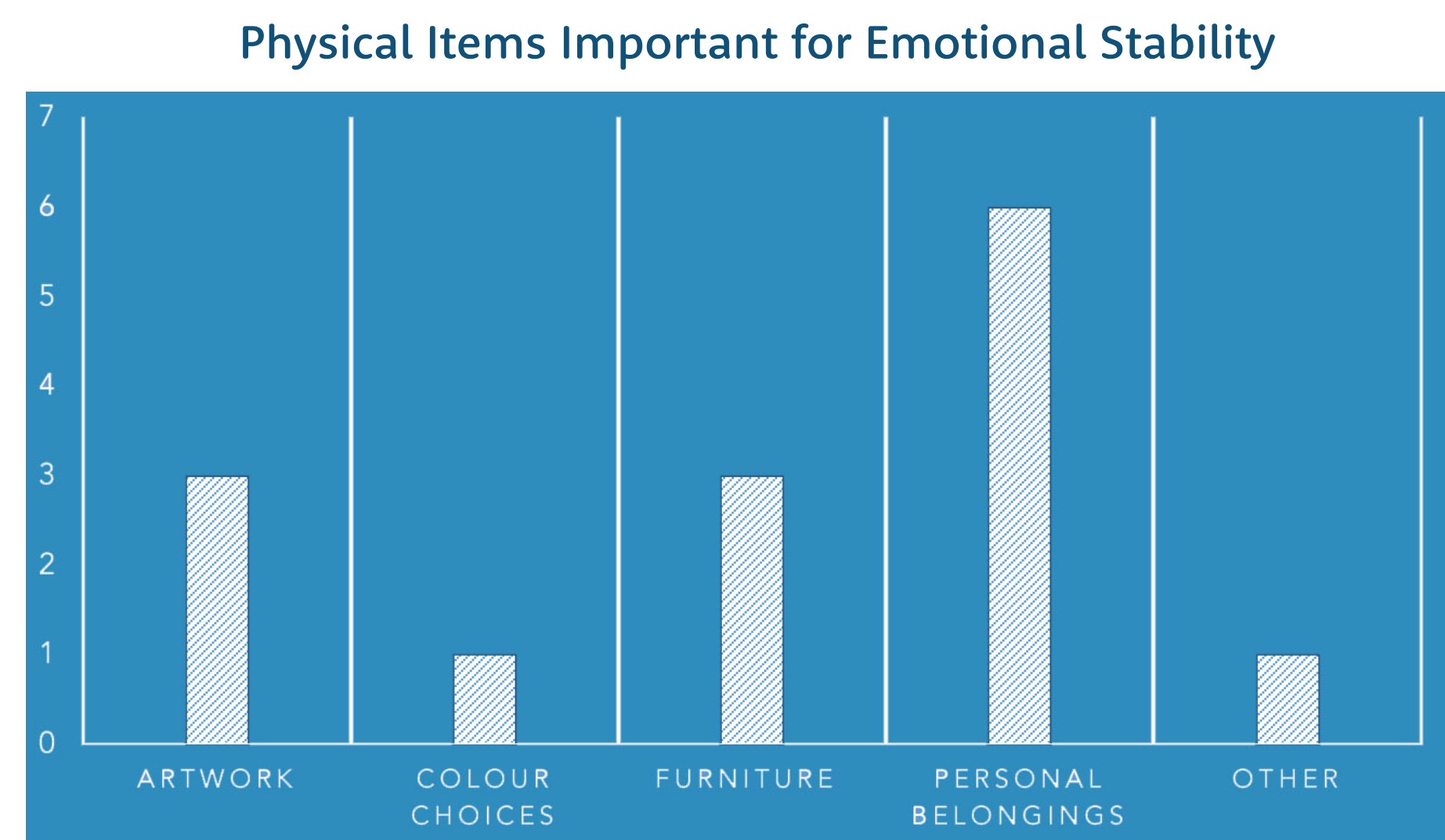
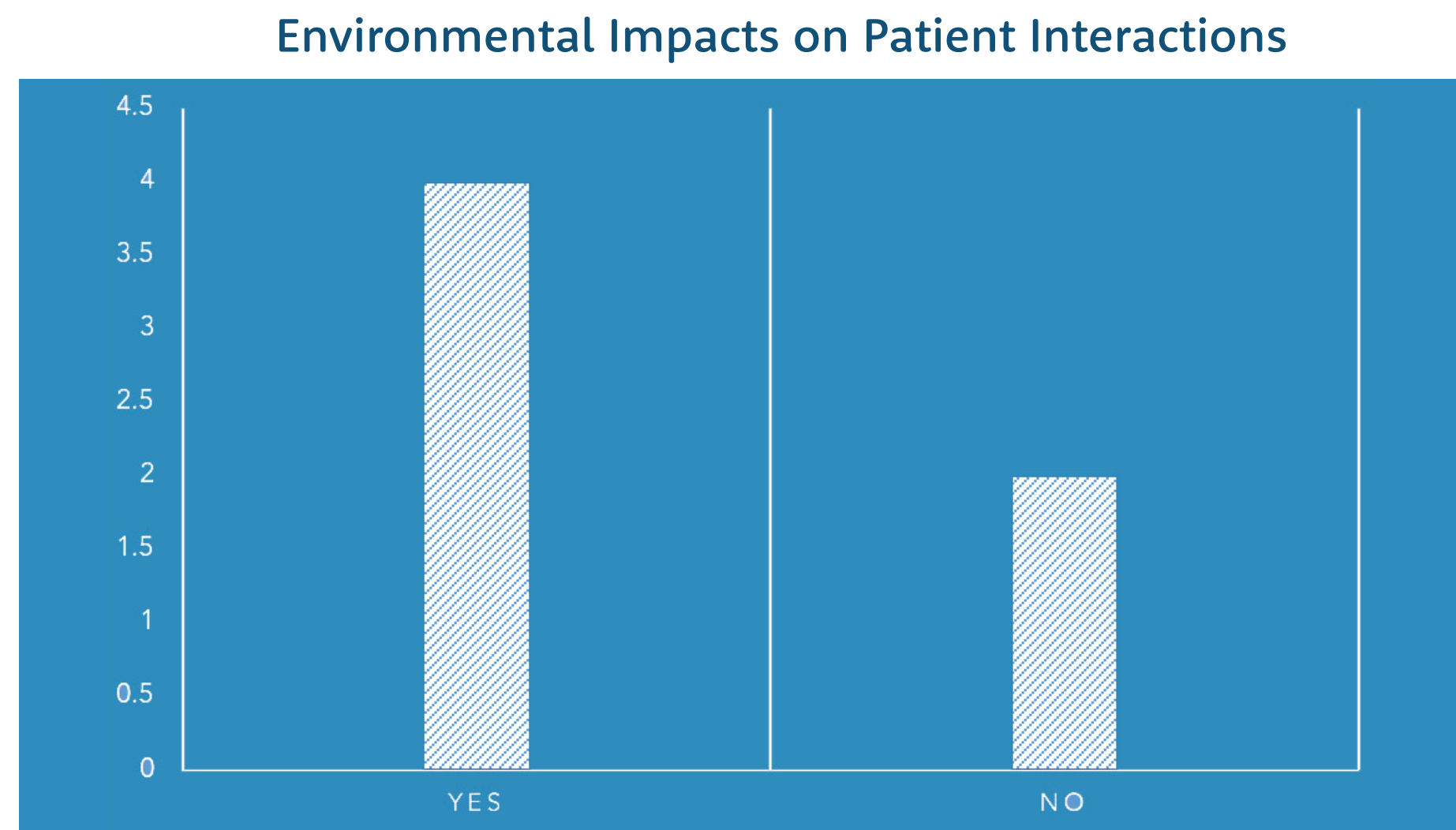
- Gain insight on how the built environment that incorporates musical therapy, support programs and familiar design aspects can connect Alzheimer’s patients and family members or caregivers.
- Understand how a built environment that utilizes these three strategies connects patients and caregivers, survey questionnaires will be used to gather data and in person interviews if required.
- Be able to survey family members and caregivers to further understand and see the connection being restored and rebuilt through this specific type of built environment.
- Research will provide valuable insight into how music therapy, support programs and familiar design choices are strengthening the relationship between Alzheimer’s patients and caregivers, when incorporated into a built environment.

Method

Questionnaire will be provided to each participant to further gain understanding of these support programs, music therapy program as well as the built environment.

Survey : 6 Participants - Family Members, Long-term Care Providers

Results



Analysis

Results support the hypothesis, while providing other valuable findings that are crucial to the interior design profession and Alzheimer’s research. The study found that:

- Specific environmental factors allowed patients to better engage with support programs and have better interactions with caregivers. Participants of the survey stated that living areas such as television rooms, were an area their patients enjoyed being and showed signs of calmness and joy in these environments.
- Having access to the outdoors or views of nature was important for the connection between Alzheimer’s patients and caregivers. This access allowed for patients to experience calmness and emotional stability.
- A Significant finding was that physical items within the patient's living environment were important for keeping patients calm. Needing personal items was a common theme that came out of the study. Items like photos of family, blankets, pillows, books or even photos of spouses who have passed away were very therapeutic to the patient, creating a sense of familiarity to the space.
- The common theme around the patient’s living environment, is that familiarity is extremely important for support programs and the overall connection with caregivers. Showed that feelings of confusion were common when patients were introduced into a new environment.
- The best environments display elements of comfort and quietness; reading rooms, art rooms, living areas, walking areas and spaces that provided natural light. The 6 participants stated that these environments allowed patients to feel at ease and allowed them to be more social with their care provider.

Designer Recommendations

- 1 Acoustic Control**
Sound can be very triggering. Consideration is crucial to prevent confusion and agitation.
- 2 Personal Elements**
Provide artwork and showcase personal elements such as images that have a personal meaning.
- 3 Access to Nature & Daylight**
Access to daylight and nature a priority in common spaces and quiet/secluded environments.
- 4 Quiet Spaces**
Areas where patients and caregivers can spend quality time and share intimate moments together.
- 5 Common & Familiar Spaces**
Design spaces to feel familiar, lowering anxiety and confusion experienced when entering a new environment.